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AUTHOR Booth, John D.; Brown, K. Edwin
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ABSTRACT

In this digest the functions of an administrator in gifted and talented education are explored. Administrators are seen to have responsibilities in awareness of the students, in community, and the curriculum. Among specific tasks outlined for administrators are developing plans for continuing identification of gifted students, ensuring that instruction is differentiated, and evaluating all facets of the program. Budgeting and motivating are key functions in program development. In providing differentiated instruction, the administrator should begin with needs assessment of instructional priorities on which to base differentiation decisions. Evaluation of teacher performance should take into account such factors as pace and sequencing of instruction and the teacher's abilities in task analysis and question analysis. Administrators should be knowledgeable about state plans and regulations regarding gifted programs, promote parent participation, appreciate gifted students' special counseling needs, and advocate good inservice training for staff. (CL)

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THE ADMINISTRATOR'S ROLE IN THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN

Analysis of the research on effective schools reveals that one of the key features of such schools is effective leadership. This generalization should, therefore, apply to the education of gifted students.

What Is the Role of the Administrator in Gifted Education?

A key responsibility for the administrator is awareness, which is essential to decision making. The administrator must be aware of the traits of gifted students in the gifted population. A crucial part of this awareness is sensitivity to the community—its values, its goals for gifted youth, and its willingness to support special programs. Another component of this awareness is diagnostic in nature. The administrator should be aware of the local curriculum and its ability to meet the needs of gifted students and should be able to identify local resources that will help meet these needs.

What Specific Tasks Should the Administrator Perform?

The administrator must be responsible for overseeing the development of the program for the gifted. The administrator should:

- Develop and/or implement a plan for identifying gifted students on a continuing basis.
- Create an awareness among school personnel and the community of the needs for the education of gifted students.
- Develop programs geared to the intellectual and creative growth of gifted students.
- Ensure that instruction for gifted students is differentiated.
- Use community resources in the education of gifted students.
- Evaluate and implement all facets of the gifted program.

How Can the Administrator Develop a Workable Program?

Special programs for the gifted are an essential part of any school program that recognizes individual differences among pupils. Although the teacher plays a vital role in identifying and providing instruction for the gifted child in the classroom, the administrator serves as the motivator of people (staff, community, students, parents) and the promoter of a practical, flexible, and meaningful program.

It is important that the administrator put the program for gifted students in the proper perspective—one that clearly establishes the fact that the program is an essential component of the total school program. This can be done by including the budget for the program for the gifted as part of the comprehensive budget, not one that is separate, and therefore easily reduced. The budget for the program for the gifted should be included as one of the school board's priorities along with academic, vocational, athletic, and arts programs, as well as programs for the handicapped. The local budget should reflect the additional costs, according to the administrative arrangement, of providing a program for gifted students.

How Does Differentiation of Instruction Affect Administrative Responsibilities in the Area of the Gifted and Talented?

The use of differentiated instructional techniques is a major component of a workable educational program for gifted and talented students. For most programs of differentiated instruction, school administrators should assess their divisions and develop an accurate profile of the gifted and talented school-age population. Needs assessments to determine instructional priorities should then be analyzed and divided into component parts. Each component may then be matched with the type(s) of differentiated instructional program necessary to meet the educational needs of identified children. Within this context, differentiation may be viewed not only as a teaching strategy, but as an administrative technique that will facilitate education.

What Are the Ramifications for the Evaluation of Teacher Performance?

Effective instruction for gifted students differs from regular classroom instruction; hence, the evaluator must look for these differences. The pace of instruction in a class for gifted students is usually quicker than that provided for regular students. The sequencing of instruction according to many popular models may be different for gifted students; able students make cognitive leaps and, thus, may reach the conceptual level earlier. Also, gifted students are noted for the ability to retain knowledge, thus, review or practice sessions may be abbreviated.

The evaluator must also determine if instruction is adequate to meet the level of intelligence of gifted students. To ascertain these levels, the instructor must be able to perform task analysis and question analysis.

How Can an Administrator Work Effectively with Parents?

Time and effort are needed in fostering positive relationships between parents and administrators. An effective program of parent involvement is one in which parents are regarded as essential elements of the educational service delivery system. Optimally, parent involvement should be an established policy of the school division. The administrator should remember that parents can provide valuable information about their gifted child that can be used in educational programming. Also, parents who are involved in their child's educational program are its best advocates.

Local school administrators may want to establish an advisory committee and parents should be included as members. This also helps develop support for the local program.

How Do Federal, State, and Local Policies Affect Program Planning for Gifted Students?

Most states have developed definitions for the identification of gifted students based on an early federal report (Marland, 1972). These ideas continue to have widespread support and should be reviewed by school administrators as they develop and revise their programs. There has been a lack of federal support for programs for gifted students, but efforts are being made to include the needs of the gifted in some legislation affecting general education programs. State departments of education have increased their role and authority in developing procedures and programs for the gifted as state funds have increased to support local programs. School administrators should be knowledgeable concerning state plans and regulations for programs for the gifted. This knowledge will help the administrator develop effective programs and receive available funds. Policies and programs approved by the local school board for gifted students should be reviewed and those that have not been successful should be revised or eliminated.

What Other Considerations Should the Administrator Make in Establishing Effective Gifted Programs?

The administrator should be aware of the special counseling needs of gifted youth. Most educators believe the "cream rises" myth and, therefore, ignore the special sensitivity of gifted students. It is easy for administrators to assume that since these students make good grades, they are well adjusted and have no counseling needs.

Gifted students have a special need for career counseling. Making a career commitment is difficult for students with multiple aptitudes and myriad interests.

Good in-service programs for administrators, teachers, and counsellors can train these persons to provide a differentiated program for gifted students that has merit for the student, teacher, and parents.

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Prepared by John D. Booth, Associate Director, Programs for the Gifted, Virginia Department of Education and K. Edwin Brown, Principal and Administrator of Programs for the Gifted, Virginia Beach Public Schools.

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